

BAHRAIN

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" to promote human and constitutional rights

From Tunisia to Bahrain; the fine thread of revolutionary change

The reverberations of the Tunisian revolution are felt in the four corners of the Arab world. It symbolizes yet another successful revolt by the people who are often oppressed and dispossessed against their oppressors. The people's revolution in that North African Arab Muslim country is a constant reminder that the Arab streets have not yet perished although decades of neglect, repression and selective targeting have rendered them dormant. It is also astonishing to see how what had appeared to be "dead" beings have now emerged as strong, dedicated to change and ready to undertake what it needs to bring about serious change to their political and social regimes. Decades of repression appear to have achieved little in terms of dedication and love of positive change. This is despite the rise in negative phenomena such as fear, consumerism, factionalism, sectarianism and lack of interest in politics. The close following of the day-to-day events in the streets of Tunis and other towns indicates dedication to the long-awaited and painfully overdue change. With the youth of many societies languishing in jails, subjected to ill-treatment and torture, it has been amazing to see the reaction of the ordinary people in the Arab capitals dreaming of an eventual release from the onslaught of this dictatorial rule. The work of Al Jazeera has, once again, been outstanding during the ongoing revolution. It has added new dimensions to the notions of "revolution", "change" and "mass protests".

For Bahrainis, the events of Tunis have been anticipated despite the cruelty of the regime of that country. It is not enough to hold people to ransom in this day and age. It cannot lead to peace and tranquility to deny people their basic rights and it does not help the cause to indulge in the satanic rituals of murdering people for their private or public opinion. The killings that had taken place among the revolutionary Tunisians had sealed the fate of the regime. The President, Zain Al Abideen Bin Ali had no choice but to flee the country. He had to beg around for refuges when only Saudi Arabia granted him temporary shelter. It is yet another episode of a tyrant looking for somewhere to plan for political and eventual death. The lesson of the Shah of Iran who had fled the country in mid January 1979, is still omnipresent

despite the passage of more than three decades. His admission to the USA led to the occupation of the US Embassy in Tehran that led to severe complications to the relations of the two countries that have clouded the relations until now. France refused to Allow the Tunisian dictator to enter, but allowed him to be the guest of none other the Saudi monarchs where he could spend the rest of his life.

The downfall of Ben Ali's despotic rule has shocked most Arab regimes who had, hitherto, thought an Iranian-style revolution could not happen on their lands due to various factors. The Gulf states have thought, and still believe that oil money is a powerful tool to deter public protests. They use the massive oil wealth as leverage against public anger although the economic and social situation is not as rosy as they like to present to others. In Bahrain, for example, a university graduate cannot dream of achieving immediate employment or owning a house. Many have to wait several years before they are employed. Most would depend on their parents to build a tiny flat for them before getting married. The oil wealth has not yielded good managerial skills among members of the ruling families. Moreover, it seems that abundance of oil wealth has made them greedier and less willing to share it with their fellow citizens. Their hearts have hardened and their attitude to good governance has retarded many steps back. The gap between the rich and the poor is ever widening and the situation has become so polarized against the have-nots that social monitors have repeatedly predicted a "revolution by the hungry" in the near future.

Over the past few weeks Bahrainis have compared the situation in their country to that prevailing in Tunisia before the fall of the dictator. They argued that Ben Ali's crimes are of lesser magnitude than those perpetrated by the Al Khalifa ruling family. Despite his evil policies, Ben Ali did not undertake to change the demography of the country and marginalized the native Shia Muslims as Hamad has done. Ben Ali did not own half of the lands of Tunisia, neither did he put his hands on most of the islands of the country. He did not occupy 90 percent of the

coast line of the country. The Bahraini ruler has done all these and committed more crimes. Ben Ali did not sentence two ten years old boys to six months in jail for taking part in a pro-democracy protest as the Al Khalifa has done. Ben Ali did not own his own 747 Jumbo Jet or a private international airport. The Al Khalifa regime has committed countless crimes against humanity through torture and policies that fit within the UN Convention on Genocide. The regime is holding to its position only through the unyielding support from Washington and London. The departing US Ambassador, Adam Erlie has spent his diplomatic years in Bahrain to prop up support to the regime to the extent that made its officials boast of their ability to do anything against the Bahrainis and no one would be able to challenge them. "Washington is supporting us" they repeatedly said.

The revolution that has taken place in Tunisia will not be confined to the borders of that country. The striking similarities between Bahrain and Tunisia, in terms of poverty of the citizens, the corruption of the regime and the isolation of the ruling elite mean that Bahrain is in line for political disturbances and that the US will only hurt itself if it insists on propping up a tribal, discriminatory and antiquated regime of government. The long-awaited revolt may be delayed but it cannot be eliminated. With 25 Bahraini scholars, academics, professionals and scientists languishing behind bars in squalid conditions are factors that will push Bahrainis to the forefront of revolt against this dictatorship. Years of suffering, hundreds of prisoners, thousands jobless and similar number homeless mean that tomorrow cannot be the same as today and the future will not allowed to be a replica of the present or the past. Change will, God willing, come to the people of Bahrain sooner than later. Any attempt to delay the anticipated change will be decisively crushed by the will of the people who have waited long for their salvation. The Al Khalifa are holding onto their position at their own perils. Time has now come for a serious change to this unholy regime with the participation of all sectors of society. Victory can only be with the victims, the wronged and the aggrieved. That is what has happened in Bahrain.

Tunis's upheaval cast shadows on the show trial of Bahrainis

In clear violation of the most basic condition of justice, the Al Khalifa-appointed judge imposed a team of lawyers on 23 Bahraini innocent people facing the prospect of life imprisonment. The lawyers chosen by the defendants had been dismissed for insisting on investigation torture and calling for re-investigation of the case, and replaced by Rashid Al Khalifa, minister of justice, with another team whose members refused to take up the case without the consent of the victims. A third team was then carefully chosen from amongst the Al Khalifa cronies, some of whom agreed to "defend" the victims against their wishes. In today's session, the victims said that these lawyers would be responsible for providing a legal justification for the ready sentences that would be announced against the Bahrainis. It has become public knowledge that heavy sentences had been prepared and the victims had been tortured to accept the charge that had been designed to be in line with the verdict and sentence. This is a unique situation where the charge is trumped up to suit the punishment desired by the ruler at his hour of rage. The trial was postponed until 27th January.

The families of the Bahrainis victims have appealed to the international conscience to take a stand against this flagrant miscarriage of justice. They also say that the officials from US, UK and French embassies who have attended the seven court sessions bear greater responsibility than anyone else to expose this total disregard to the basic elements of justice. So

far, the silence of these officials has been construed as tacit approval of the court proceedings.

A delegation from the Arab Lawyers Union dispatched a fact-finding mission to Manama to investigate this judicial crisis. The three-man delegation consisted of the Libyan Lawyers Union, Al Bashir Rajab, the Syrian Lawyers President, Nazar Al Sakif and Nasser Kamal Nasser, from the Arab Lawyers Union. They would meet the minister of justice and other lawyers.

Meanwhile, the people have reacted in rage against the continued oppression by the Al Khalifa family. Many voices have now been raised calling for an end to this antiquated regime as it has repeatedly failed to uphold the rule of law and continued its attacks on the liberties, rights and wealth of the people. The downfall of the regime of Zein Al Abideen bin Ali of Tunisia has boosted the morale of the Bahraini people and urged them to take more active role in working to hasten the eventual fall of this regime that has ruled with cruelty, total disregard for human rights, looting people's wealth, occupying more than half the lands of the country and 90 percent of its sea coastlines and imposed a regime of occupation rather than a civilian one. The basic demands for a constitution written by the people and the return of people's wealth have been at the heart of the demands of the opposition. Slogans have been scraped on walls, articles published in websites and blogs and intermittent protests organised to express rejection of the regime. This is in spite of the inten-

sification of torture, ill-treatment, kidnaping, deprivation of jobs and housing for anti-regime elements and total disregard to the environment and well being of the Bahrainis.

On 18th January, smoke billowing from burning tyres was seen near the international airport near the town of Dair. Riot police intervened to put out the fires. On 17th January, the people of Sitra expressed their anger at the continuation of detentions and repression by burning tyres along Street No 1 causing disruption. Smoke was seen from far distances.

As a token of appreciation and encouragement, a group of unemployed Bahrainis congregated outside the Tunisian embassy in Manama to express condolences at the demise of Mohammad Bu Azizi who had immolated himself in protest against the treatment he had received from a policeman. At 7.30 AM Tuesday morning (18th January), the group made their stand with determination and dignity. The Bahraini unemployed are well-positioned to feel the agony that had driven him to burn himself. Bahrainis have been denied decent jobs for decades. It is part of a policy to subjugate the population which is becoming increasingly aware of the criminal activities of the ruler and his cronies. The group was surrounded by the police and prevented from reaching the embassy. They stood in silence to pay their respect to Bu Azizi, with candles and flowers in their hands. They were pursued by the police and dispersed.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
20th January 2011

The regime's war against the lawyers amid widening crisis

The drama at the Al Khalifa court set up to try 25 Bahrainis has continued to unfold. In today's session, more lawyers from the third groups of lawyers appointed by the ruling family to "defend" the Bahrainis, decided that they could not present a viable defence if they defendants refused to accept them. This followed a turbulent start of the proceedings when Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace, followed by Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Miqdad, stood up, confirmed that torture had continued until this morning and announced their refusal of the new team of lawyers. They insisted that they be represented by the original team who were dismissed by the ruling family because they had two demands: investigating the torture of the defendants and re-investigating them under the court jurisdiction in their presence. The Al Khalifa-appointed judge, Ibrahim Al Zayed, who had always sought to shelter the torturers, ignored them and proceeded to order those remaining from the Al-Khalifa-appointed defence team to start their defence in a session scheduled for 20th January. He has chosen to ignore the rights of the defendants and has thus denied them a fair trial. The outcome of the trial is a foregone

conclusion; They will be found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment terms of up to 20 years. Few of them will be acquitted to give the false impression of fairness. Nevertheless, the Bahrainis have succeeded in turning the show trial into one of the most instances of miscarriage of justice as they exposed their mutilated bodies to the court and pleaded for investigation free of torture. In another attack on justice, the minister of justice, Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa, ordered that the 19 patriotic lawyers who had acted within the morals of their profession, be punished severely by for refusing to act upon his orders. They have challenged him and questioned the legality of this referral and said they are determined to defend their position. The ruling family's approach to modern governance could not grasp the idea of real separation of powers. In the past decade the ruler has imposed member of his family on all ministries and departments to ensure total compliance with his orders and wishes. It is hoped that the legal battle would expose this antiquated regime further.

Early this morning, the young people of Karzakkan expressed their support for the group that is being tried by burning tyres in the street. Despite the massive security

crackdown against Bahrainis, the ruling family has failed to stem the rising anti-regime activities. While the lawyers have now become engaged in their own war with the Al Khalifa judiciary, the people have become more involved with the day-to-day anti-regime movement. In the past week several areas participated in what has now become a unique way of expressing anger against the ruling family. On 5th January, the people of Hamala took part in burning tyres on the main road. The following day, tyres were burnt near the Abdul Karim Roundabout (near Jidhafs). Other villages followed suit, including Sitra, Karbabad and Nuwaidrat. More slogans are now painted on the walls in various parts of the country. The anti-regime activities are set to increase especially as repression against the youth continued.

The injustices administered against Bahrainis have continued. Yesterday, six Bahrainis described in vivid details how they had been tortured by officials of the National Security Agency (NSA) and forced to sign false confessions about their alleged roles in various incidents including illegal congregation of more than five people to burning tyres in the road and using Molotov cocktail.

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Revolution in the making as Torturers judge political activists

In a flagrant attack on justice 23 Bahrainis were removed today from a court room where their torturers were asked to give "evidence" against them obtained under sever forms of torture. The court drama started when the Al Khalifa-appointed judge asked the torturers to present their "evidence" against the Bahrainis and that a hand-picked team of lawyers be appointed to "defend" the Bahrainis who had repeatedly refused them. Some of these lawyers have already condemned their would be "clients" and made the task of the "judge" of announcing the ready-made verdicts and sentences easier. It was one of the most outrageous miscarriages of justice, officially committed and sanctioned in the presence of officials from the American, British and French embassies in Manama. The silence of these officials and their governments on the injustices meted by the Al Khalifa on Bahrainis is deafening and defies the most basic expectations from those "democratic" countries. The victims stood up courageously and refused to remain in the court room with their torturers headed by the notorious criminal Bader Ibrahim Al Ghaith. The families of the victims have appealed to the international human conscience to take a stand against these serious infringements of justice and human rights. How could the victim be allowed to be crushed so mercilessly by a gang of criminals? How could these "diplomats" opt to silence at a time when some factual words from them could tame the aggression of these criminals? Isn't their silence making them accomplices in these crimes?

Despite the silence of those heatless witnesses, a veteran human rights campaigner stood up in the court and challenged the appointed team of lawyers. The "judge" who is also the enemy of the victims, immediately ordered his removal from the court, together with all the defendants. They were transferred to another room connected by TV screen and loudspeaker and forced to see and listen to their torturers as they presented their "evidence"! Both the US and UK embassies have a lot to answer for as they continue their propping up of the criminal Al Khalifa regime.

The public anti-regime feelings are rising by the day. This morning the youth of the town of Mhaza in Sitra expressed their outrage at the Al Khalifa regime with protests resulting in burning tyres on the main roads of the town. The riot police hurried to extinguish them as the regime becomes more worried about the appearance of anger and public outburst of protests following the popular revolution in Tunisia and Egypt.

Meanwhile more criminal attacks are carried out against Bahrainis. On 25th January boy of 14 years was severely wounded by members of the Death

Squads using shotguns. Hassan Ali, 14, was leaving his home when he was called from behind. When he turned to see the caller he was struck with the shotgun. Images of his terrible wounds in the face and hands have shocked the people.

Yesterday Ahmad Mahdi Ramadhan appealed to the authorities to release his 12 years old son, Mundhir, who has been held and tortured since his arrest on Sunday 23rd January. He said that he had handed the boy to the police after they insisted to get him. The father said that his son did not commit any crime despite the allegations that he had taken part in anti-regime activities. The boy is still behind bars with more than 100 children accused of anti-regime activities.

More Bahrainis have been arrested in recent days. The father of Ali Sa'ad, the blind young Bahraini who was arrested in September, has been arrested. Three other members of the family have also been detained, Mahdi, Sa'ad and Hassan. Almost all male members of the Sa'ad family are now in the hands of the Al Khalifa torturers despite their innocence.

On 24th January Freedom House issued a statement calling on the Government of Bahrain to release Mohammad Al Rashid, a political blogger and critic of the government. It said: Mr. Rashid's alleged crimes include detailing human rights abuses by the government and spreading opposition statements. The arrest of Mr. Rashid follows a pattern of government crackdowns against political opponents and comes in the wake of last year's arrest of pro-democracy blogger Ali Abdulemam, who was arrested on charges of spreading "false news" in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections in October. Censorship and repression are common features in Bahrain, an authoritarian country ruled by the Sunni al-Khalifa family, which has been at odds with the country's Shiite majority for more than two centuries... Freedom House condemns recent crackdown on political opposition, and calls on the Bahraini government to release Mr. Rashid as well as fellow political prisoners.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
27 January 2011

War against lawyers

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In view of their horrific torture, they were bailed to appear again in one month's time. On 9th January, two more Bahrainis were sentenced to harsh terms. Mahmood Hussain Mohammad, 21 and Jaffar Hassan Isa, 32, both from Ma'amir were sentenced to ten years in jail for allegedly starting a fire in a scrap yard at Al Sakhir, in the south of the country. Both denied the charges but were forced, under torture, to sign false statements.

Meanwhile the Death Squads continued their attacks on towns and villages. A young man from Karzakkan was hit



on 8th January with a shotgun that left him with serious injury. His father spoke to local media about the incident and gave details of how the young man had been beaten up by members of the Death Squads before being allowed to drive his car. As soon as he moved, he was shot with the shotgun that left him with at least 15 shrapnels in various parts of his body especially the head.

The American Ambassador, Adam Erlic, has left his post in Manama leaving behind bad memories among the people of Bahrain. He openly expressed support to the regime and failed to condemn its atrocities against the Bahrainis. His moral support of the regime has placed the US in line with the enemy, a development that is much regretted by the people. **Bahrain Freedom Movement**

13th January 2011

Freedom House: Continued Political Repression in Bahrain

Human rights activists in Bahrain reported the arrest of Mohammed Rashid, a political blogger and critic of the government. Mr. Rashid's alleged crimes include detailing human rights abuses by the government and spreading opposition statements. The arrest of Mr. Rashid follows a pattern of government crackdowns against political opponents and comes in the wake of last year's arrest of pro-democracy blogger Ali Abdulemam, who was arrested on charges of spreading "false news" in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections in October.

Censorship and repression are common features in Bahrain, an authoritarian country ruled by the Sunni al-Khalifa family, which has been at odds with the country's Shiite majority for more than two centuries. Despite occasional pledges of reform, political opposition is non-existent as the 2002 constitution gives the king power over the executive, legislative and judicial authorities. Freedom of expression is tightly controlled following the passage of a vaguely worded Press Law in 2002 which allows the state to imprison journalists for criticizing the king or Islam, or for threatening "national security."

Freedom House condemns recent crackdown on political opposition, and calls on the Bahraini government to release Mr. Rashid as well as fellow political prisoners. <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=581&alert=22>



Administrative harassment against 24 lawyers



Bahrain

24 January 2011

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in Bahrain.

Description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources that 24 appointed lawyers were referred to a disciplinary committee initiated by the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs after they refused to abide by an order of the same Minister. They risk penalties ranging from an oral warning, a written warning, temporary disbarment to definitive disbarment, depending whether they have already committed another disciplinary offence. The first meeting of the committee will be held on January 25, 2011.

According to the information received, the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs ordered the establishment of a disciplinary committee to investigate on 24 lawyers, namely Ali Ahmed Al-Oraibi, Shahnaz Ali Abdullah, Loay Abdul Ghani Qarooni, Nabila Sayad Alawi Majeed, Timor Abdullah Karimi, Ali Abdullah Al Ayoubi, Mohamed Ali Alwatani, Mohamed Eid Al-Husseini, Ibrahim Saleh Ibrahim, Abdul Aziz Abdullah Al Ayoubi, Ibrahim Issa Ramadan, Hassan Abbas Haider, Hussein Jaafar Alnahash, Hussein Mohsen Hussein, Mahmoud Hassan Bash, Ziad Reuven, Mona Mohammed Salim, Nouf Mohammed Yousif, Abdulhadi Ali, Saleh Abdel Karim Al-Marzouq, Abdulali Hamza al-Asfour, Layla Jassim Al-Jawad, Mohammad Ali Mirbati, Ahmed Jassim Abdullah, who had been appointed by the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs to represent a group of 25 people including 11 human rights defenders accused of "membership to a terrorist network aiming to overthrow the government" in a trial which opened on October 28, 2010 [1]. The 24 lawyers refused to represent the 25 defendants arguing that the respect of the rights of the accused implied that the defendants agreed to the appointment of lawyers. On December 9, 2010, a first group of lawyers who had been appointed by the

25 defendants decided to withdraw from the case to protest with the decision of the High Criminal Court not to investigate on allegations of torture and ill-treatment made by the defendants.

23 new lawyers were then appointed by the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs and during the hearing of December 23, 2010, the new lawyers requested the consent of the 25 defendants to represent them in this trial, in accordance with Article 20 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain which states that "anyone accused of an offence must have a lawyer to defend him with his consent". The 25 refused to be represented by the new defence team and requested representation by their initial defence team. 19 lawyers out of the 23 then decided to withdraw from the case to comply with the rights of the defendants.

New lawyers were again appointed by the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs and during the hearing of January 13, 2011, some of the new lawyers requested the consent of the 25 defendants to represent them in this trial, in accordance with Article 20 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain which states that "anyone accused of an offence must have a lawyer to defend him with his consent". The 25 refused to be represented by the new defence team. Four lawyers then decided to withdraw from the case to comply with the rights of the defendants.

On January 20, 2011, at the following hearing, Lawyer Abdul Wahab Amin also decided to withdraw from the case. The Observatory fears that the latter will also be subjected to the disciplinary procedure. The Observatory is concerned by the administrative harassment faced by the 24 lawyers, which merely aims at punishing them for standing for the respect of the rights of the defence.

The Observatory urges the Minister of Justice to re-examine its decision to open a disciplinary procedure, to put an end to

any kind of harassment against lawyers and to refrain from hindering activities of promotion and protection of human rights. The observatory also calls upon the authorities of Bahrain to conform in all circumstances with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Bahrain.

Actions requested:

The Observatory urges the authorities of Bahrain to:

- Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders in Bahrain;
- Put an end to any kind of harassment - including administrative - against the above-mentioned lawyers as well as against all human rights defenders in Bahrain and ensure in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their work without unjustified hindrances;
- Conform in any circumstances with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted on December 9, 1998 by the United Nations General Assembly, in particular: its article 1, which states that "everyone has the right, individually or in association with others, to promote the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels"; its article 10 which provides that "No one shall participate, by act or by failure to act where required, in violating human rights and fundamental freedoms and no one shall be subjected to punishment or adverse action of any kind for refusing to do so"; and its article 12.2 which states that "the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration".
- Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Bahrain.

